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Michael Hamburger's Crusade against Ignorance and Prejudice: German Poetry and the United States

Preliminaries

In his obituary for Michael Hamburger, published in *The Independent* in June 2007, Iain Galbraith (2007) expresses the view that with Hamburger's death "the English language takes leave of one of its most gifted and gently influential poets as well as the twentieth-century's most distinguished and prolific translator of German poetry." But where does one start when analysing the influence one individual person has exercised on the reception of German Literature in America? Every critic must be conscious of the fact that in most cases he has only access to insignificant external characteristics, such as reviews in specialised magazines which, more often than not, have nothing to do with the actual reception of a book among the reading public, and letters to the editors of such magazines. Remarks in autobiographies or books of criticism may give some impression of the particular influence a writer or a book of translation has had on the career of an individual colleague. If fortunate, one may even persuade publishers to look up their statistics, if available, and provide hard facts such as print-runs and sales figures. Nonetheless, these superficialities do not throw light on the reception process that takes place between a book and its readership. A writer's reputation in a country other than his own depends almost entirely on the ability and taste of his translators, provided that this particular author's work is selected for translation in the first place. A translator not only influences the reception process by the way in which he translates a text, but also by what he considers worth translating. The smaller the market – the number of translators and translations – is, the greater the extent the influence of particular translator-editors can be felt, which may result in false heroes and strange gods, i.e., an overrepresentation of particular authors in foreign countries, which does not correspond with the real stature of their work. On the other hand, translators may even resurrect authors from oblivion, as is the

case with Hamburger and Franz Baermann Steiner (1992a: 38–39 and 1992b), never recognized in the German-speaking countries. The authors selected by Hamburger have been fortunate in their translator.

Hamburger's Various Artistic Masks: Translator-Editor and Critic

Hamburger seems to have influenced the American reception of German Literature on various levels: as translator, editor of anthologies, critic, and poet. His first major book to appear in the States was *Beethoven: Letters, Journals, and Conversations*, which was published by Pantheon Books (New York) together with the London press Thames & Hudson in 1951. The former publishing house was directed by Kurt Wolff, an eminent German émigré publisher, who in 1961 founded his Helen & Kurt Wolff Books imprint, which he edited as a specialist list within the big Harcourt Brace Jovanovich publishing conglomerate. In 1953, Wolff published Hamburger's first Hölderlin collection to appear in the States entitled *Hölderlin: His Poems*, whose British edition had been issued by Harvill Press one year earlier. It was a revised and enlarged edition of *Poems* published in 1943, of which Hamburger said that it

> came out far too early, when I was too young. All I had was enthusiasm, but no knowledge. I did not even understand the metres of Hölderlin's poems and so I translated them into free verse. When I was in the army from 1943 to 1947 I reworked these translations and added new ones as well. First I found the Harvill Press, who published it in England. As I was already in touch with Wolff I must have mentioned it to him that this book was coming out and he took it over.
>
> (Hamburger 1998)

Hölderlin: His Poems, with prose translations below the original, was reviewed by Lisel Mueller, a poet and translator, in the January 1963 issue of *Poetry* (Chicago). In this very favourable review the critic stresses that Hamburger "presents us with a fair and generous selection of Hölderlin's poems [...] includ[ing] all the famous expansive poems from the middle period [...]. It is in these poems that the diction [...] becomes extremely difficult with its inverted syntax, incremental appended clauses, and ambiguous usage of single words" (Mueller 1963: 289). Fourteen years later University of Michigan Press at Ann Arbor published Hamburger's – once again – revised edition entitled *Poems and Fragments*. This happened through the mediation of the poet Donald Hall, who had, together with his co-editors Robert Pack and Louis Simpson, included some of Hamburger's own poems in the anthology

New Poets of England and America (Cleveland: Meridian, 1957). Many of the revisions included in the Michigan Press edition had already been incorporated by Hamburger into Penguin's *Selected Poems* published in 1961.

The same year the Bollingen Foundation published Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Poems and Verse Plays*, edited by Hamburger, in their Bollingen Series. In *A Mug's Game: Intermittent Memoirs 1924–1954*, Hamburger reports the following about the difficulties involved in the publication of this volume:

> Early in the new year [1951] I got down to work on the Beethoven book. At the same time Stephen Spender telephoned, suggesting that he and I collaborate over the Hofmannsthal translations he was doing for the Bollingen Foundation. A line-by-line collaboration proved impossible. Each of us translated different works. After complications of various kinds, and the lapse of nearly a decade, the editorship was offered to me. Since that was a way of breaking the deadlock, I accepted, with Stephen's generous consent. (Hamburger 1973: 251)

Both Spender and Hamburger contributed translations to the volume, which finally included twenty-three lyrics and six verse plays, mostly written during Hofmannsthal's early youth, in the 1890s, with complete German texts facing the English, and a preface by T. S. Eliot. In her review published in *Poetry* (Chicago), Lisel Mueller pays attention to the American readers' ignorance of Hofmannsthal and provides useful background information to the period covered by the volume. But she also refers to particular difficulties Hofmannsthal's translators had to face up to:

> The various translators do an able job with the unrhymed material, but often run afoul of rhyme and metre, when they try to reproduce it in English. Hofmannsthal frequently uses rhyming verbs, and since the verb, in German, normally occurs at the end of a clause or sentence, this works out well, but carried over into English, it produces an effect of awkward inversion and "poetic" rhetoric. Then, too, in a perfectly scanning translation, there is always the need to add words to fill out the line – German words generally requiring more syllables than the corresponding English ones – and these extra words, usually adjectives, are at least superfluous and sometimes confusing. (Mueller 1963: 289–90)

In 1963 the Bollingen Foundation published another Hofmannsthal volume edited by Hamburger entitled *Selected Plays and Libretti*, which contains three plays and three libretti: *Electra* (trans. Alfred Schwarz), *The Salzburg Great Theatre of the World* (trans. Vernon Watkins), *The Cavalier of the Rose* (trans. Christopher Holme), *Arabella* (trans. Nora Wydenbruck and Christopher Middleton), *The Difficult Man*, which Edwin Muir "had wanted to translate before

he became ill" (Hamburger 1973: 252) and was finally translated by Willa Muir, and Hamburger himself contributed his rendering of the sombre tragedy *The Tower*. Both volumes were distributed by Pantheon Books, who – as was already mentioned – published Hamburger's first book of translation in the States. In 1970 Princeton University Press published the editor's introductions to the two volumes of Hofmannsthal's *Selected Works* separately as a critical book entitled *Hofmannsthal: Three Essays*, which, Hamburger stresses, was taken quite seriously by Hofmannsthal scholars.

Günter Grass, the novelist, was introduced to the American audience with Ralph Manheim's rendering of *The Tin Drum*, published by Pantheon in 1963. Although John Simon, in his review for *Partisan Review*, considers Grass's novel a German approximation of *Ulysses*, he slaughters Manheim's translation:

> It is to be deplored that *The Tin Drum* comes to English readers diminished by Ralph Manheim's translation: in length, by well over a hundred pages; in quality, inestimably. Much that was either too difficult, or seemed too elaborate or obscene, has been flattened out, abridged, or omitted. On almost every page constructions, jokes, meanings are weakened, disregarded, or missed. None of which, however, has kept the translation from being extolled by literary and academic reviewers alike. (Simon 1963: 452)

His American reputation as a poet, however, Grass almost exclusively owes to Hamburger and Middleton. At a time when Grass had only published two collections of poetry, *Die Vorzüge der Windhühner* (1956) and *Glasdreieck* (1960), Hamburger and Middleton collected their translations of Grass's poems to be published as *Selected Poems* by Helen & Kurt Wolff Books (New York) in 1966. Four of Hamburger's translations had been included in *Modern German Poetry 1910–1960: An Anthology with Verse Translations*, issued by New York's Grove Press in 1962. Hamburger did not approach Grass when arranging the latter's bi-lingual *Selected Poems*: "It would not have been any good sending him the early translations, because I do not think he knew any English to speak of at the time. Now he knows a bit of English, but even so I do not think he would want to be bothered with checking the translations" (Hamburger 1998). Anthony Hecht, who reviewed it for *The Hudson Review*, welcomes its publication, describing Grass as "an excellent poet," who

> deals with fantasy, irony, humor, and of his predecessors seems most to resemble Erich Kästner and Bertold Brecht, though his irony is less savage and crude than Brecht's. The translations [. . .] should not have been remarkably difficult to do, for Grass writes in a rather free form, and none of the poems included here employ

> rhyme; and on the whole the translators seem pretty well to have succeeded, though there are moments of odd awkwardness. [...] Even so, Grass is a pleasure to read, even in translation. (Hecht 1966: 338)

In her review for *Poetry* (Chicago), Lisel Mueller (1968: 338) states that Grass "falls into the category of poets who "work" in English, and Michael Hamburger and Christopher Middleton prove so in their translation." She characterises Grass's poems as "structures of specific, concrete, everyday speech imposed on bizarre backgrounds." Mueller goes beyond Hecht's categorizing by calling him "witty, brilliant, angry." To the American readership she introduces Grass as

> the moralist exposing our cupidity and stupidity, but he does it playfully, by showing us grotesqueries, odd juxtapositions. Folding chairs embody homelessness and dislocation; spoons are the curved shape of experience; situations that have been surrounded by sentiment are suddenly, and shockingly, seen in a vacuum. His surrealism can be obscure, but more often it comes frighteningly close. And he is capable also of the bitterly plain and brief statement [...]. (Mueller 1968: 338)

At the time Middleton had, more or less, dropped out as Grass's translator, and this is why the later collections, with one exception, have been translated by Hamburger exclusively. In 1969 it was again Helen & Kurt Wolff Books who published the bi-lingual collection *New Poems*, Hamburger's translation of Grass's third collection *Ausgefragt* (*Questioned*). R. H. W. Dillard (1969: 426–27), in his review for *The Kenyon Review*, found the collection "as interesting and admirable as the earlier *Selected Poems*." In the reviewer's opinion, "the book does achieve a dawn, a March in its own way, but its journey is bleak and surprising, as blunt as the fist Grass drew to burst from the dust jacket. Its poetry is as vital as Eberhart's, as honest as McAfee's." In April 1977 the same press published *In the Egg and Other Poems*, which included on its 143 pages most of the older and some new translations by Hamburger and the handful of Middleton's translations from Grass's first American volume. Since then they have issued *Drawings & Words 1954–1977* (1982) in Hamburger's and Walter Arndt's renderings and *Etchings & Words 1972–1982* (1985), which only contains translations by Hamburger. In April 1996 Harvest Books printed *Novemberland: Selected Poems 1956–1993*, its title deriving from a sequence of thirteen sonnets first published by the literary magazine *Agenda* in its "German Poetry Special Issue" in summer 1994. It is noticeable that this bilingual volume which contains fifty-four poems was published in both a hardback and a paperback edition. In

1999 Faber & Faber, whose American headquarters are in Boston, published Grass's *Selected Poems 1956 to 1993*, with translations by Hamburger exclusively.

In addition to Grass, there are many other German-language authors that Hamburger either first introduced to American readers or whose American reception and reputation are considerably dependent on his translations. Among them are Albrecht Goes, Nelly Sachs, Adolf Muschg, Günter Eich, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and Paul Celan. Enzensberger, Hamburger recalls, most probably initiated the publication of *Poems for People Who Don't Read Poems* by New York's Atheneum Press in 1968. The volume contains translations by Hamburger, Jerome Rothenberg, and Enzensberger, and was also published in Great Britain by Secker & Warburg and Penguin the same year. According to Hamburger,

> these translations should not have appeared in a single book, because the two languages – American and English – cannot be mixed. So that was really a mistake. At that time one could still just about get away with English translations in America, but nowadays people would just say, this is some foreign language. Even when the early translations of mine appeared in America, the eminent poet Kenneth Rexroth said in a review quite angrily, he uses these idioms which are British and do not mean anything to us. (Hamburger 1998)

The welcome this collection received from Michael Benedikt, as "Critic of the Month" in *Poetry* (Chicago), was not warm at all; quite the opposite. Not only does he accuse Enzensberger of "a weak style of political critique," "slip[ing] from accurate, objective criticism into mere personal complaint," of "massive rhetorical denunciations" and "a general style of grievance" (Benedikt 1968: 210), but he also criticises Rothenberg's translations for misrepresenting the German poet by "talking down:"

> The trap into which he has fallen is that of feeling he has to supply the German poet with the public touch, which he has further erred by identifying with the Common Touch. Three lines from a later section of "Foam" are: "o fire-eater with the heat turned off slip me some skin / o mummy in your mummy-cloth of pink-tinged foam god bless you / deliver your bubbling gullet to my kow-tow. . . ." Such phrases as "slip me some skin," "gullet," and "kow-tow" are not suggested by the German original and are, to say the least, inappropriate. It is as if Enzensberger showed up to read some political poems in the United States wearing a zoot suit.
>
> (Benedikt 1968: 210–11)

If one reads the original alongside Rothenberg's translation, one easily recognises that the reviewer is wrong with regard to "gullet." Benedikt stresses, however, that Hamburger and Enzensberger avoid "talking down."

Bloodaxe published *Selected Poems* in 1994 and *Kiosk* in early 1997, both of them being distributed in America by Dufour Editions in Chester Springs, Pennsylvania. Hamburger translated the majority of the poems published in Enzensberger's recent collections, to the latter the author added six translations of his own. The American author Lawrence Joseph, reviewing *Kiosk* for *Jacket* 4 (July 1998), an Internet quarterly edited by the Australian poet John Tranter, stresses Enzensberger's exceptional "vocal range and range of subjects" as well as two constants in his work: "his preoccupation with how a poem sounds [. . .] and an acute, sophisticated sense of how these voices can be constructed in a poem. Often, a poem will switch, or seem to switch, speakers; we're in aesthetic realms similar to those of Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett, John Ashbery" (Joseph 1998).

Paul Celan, whom Hamburger first met at Erich Fried's in London in 1952, was first introduced to a wider American readership by the inclusion of four poems – "Fugue of Death" and "The Jugs" in Middleton's renderings, "Shibboleth" and "In Memoriam Paul Eluard" translated by Hamburger – in the anthology *Modern German Poetry 1910–1960.* In 1971 it was again Dutton who took Celan's American reception history one important step further by publishing *Speech-Grille, and Selected Poems* in Joachim Neugroschel's rendering. In November 1972 Hamburger was awarded The Levinson Prize, which is presented annually by *Poetry* (Chicago), for his eleven translations of Celan (Dec. 1971) and sections IV and V of *Travelling*, published in the magazine between October 1971 and September 1972. The next year Jerry Glenn's 174-page book entitled *Paul Celan*, the first important study in the field of American Celan-criticism, appeared in Twayne's World Authors series. Persea Press in New York has been the main outlet for Hamburger's Celan-translations. They published the bi-lingual collections *Poems* (bought from Carcanet) in 1980, *Poems of Paul Celan* (bought from Anvil Press) in 1989, and an enlarged and revised edition in 1994, but, as Hamburger stressed in the interview, they triggered off hardly any response in America.

Hamburger's American reputation as editor and translator is usually associated with the publication of three mammoth bilingual anthologies: *Modern German Poetry 1910–1960* (with Middleton), *East German Poetry*, each being the first substantial collections of their sort to appear in America, and *German Poetry 1910–1975.* The reason why the first was published in 1962 by Grove

Press, New York, was that Hamburger had already established a strong association with them. In spring 1957 he contributed an essay to the inaugural issue of their magazine *Evergreen Review*; later in the same year they published his first book on German literature, *Reason and Energy*, its revised edition entitled *Contraries* being issued by Dutton fourteen years later. For this anthology Hamburger and Middleton collected up what translations each had done, put them together and then decided that "there were certain gaps and poets that neither of us had translated, but who ought to be in the book. Then we found other translators for those. We knew who was translating whom, since we both lived in London at that time and things were much more centralised than they are now" (Hamburger 1998). The anthology comprised 163 poems by fifty-five poets; in addition to the two editors, nine poets, among them Eva Hesse, Vernon Watkins, and David Luke, contributed twenty translations, which makes up only 12 per cent of the content. One third of the anthology is given over to poems by only six poets: Rainer Maria Rilke, Gottfried Benn, Georg Trakl, Georg Heym, Alfred Lichtenstein, and Bertolt Brecht. According to Hamburger, it sold pretty well both in America and in Britain, where it had to be reprinted three times.

Many critics have misunderstood the creative relationship between Hamburger and Middleton. They first met in London in 1955 when Hamburger was teaching at University College and Middleton held a post as lecturer in German at King's College. They co-operated on various translation and editorial projects until 1966 when Middleton emigrated to America to take up the chair of Germanic Languages and Literature at the University of Texas, Austin. Hamburger emphasised the fact that many critics misinterpreted the nature of their collaboration, thinking that: "we translated together. We never translated together, we put together our translations. Even when I did a written interview a couple of weeks ago, I was asked to tell the interviewers about my supposed collaboration with Christopher Middleton over translation" (Hamburger 1998).

The only text Hamburger and Middleton ever collaborated on is the 24-page Introduction to *Modern German Poetry 1910–1960*, which is a discussion of Expressionism and of the modern style in German poetry it initiated. They characterise the contents of the anthology by listing the poets omitted, who fall into six categories:

> (1) those Naturalists, Impressionists and Symbolists whose work is either anchored in nineteenth century conventions, or not directly modern in style or outlook (e.g., Liliencron, Dehmel, George); (2) those poets whose work appeared well into this century but who were not affected by modernist techniques (e.g., Schröder, Bor-

> chardt, Carossa); (3) those poets who anticipated Expressionism in certain poems, but whose style or outlook is not central to it (e.g., Mombert, Dauthendey); [. . .] (4) poets of those bizarre, demi-prophetic, quasi-religious or otherwise quixotic groups which may be typical of the epoch but do not invariably claim attention as sources either of its best or even of its more charactered writing (e.g., Pannwitz, zur Linde, Derleth); [. . .] (5) those, like Elisabeth Langgässer or Nelly Sachs, whose work resisted translation, (Hamburger and Middleton 1962: xxi)

and (6) with the exceptions of Brecht and Huchel, no East German poets are represented in the anthology, because, "when we were choosing and translating poems, we had not read enough of their work to enable us to choose representative poems" (Hamburger and Middleton 1962: xlii).

David Galler's review of the anthology published in *Poetry* (Chicago) was full of nationalist arrogance, implicit chauvinism, revenge, hatred, prejudice, and, perhaps, the sort of political correctness required at the time in some literary circles in America. Obviously, Galler had not read the anthology, but wanted to get rid of his anger bottled up over the years:

> Rilke, George, a few dozen poems by others, needed translating and received it. These "others" – Trakl and Benn among them – were given a thorough treatment next; though many of their poems weren't worth it, one could accept the translators' love and effort. Hamburger and Middleton have overshot that mark with their anthology. What becomes painfully clear is the extent to which Hitler's regime stunted German poets of all ages, silencing many, truncating a tradition by forcing many to write secretly with no immediate masters and no means for public expression. The Germans, however, are a stubborn people; this anthology shows how, despite Hitler, most of them persisted right on through in writing poems with autotelic imagery enough to make one shudder. Small poetic progress in this country for over half a century! (Galler 1964: 264)

With the next project, his bilingual *East German Poetry* anthology, which was begun under the auspices of the New York State Council for the Arts when Hamburger was Visiting Professor at State University of New York, Buffalo, in 1969 and finally published by Dutton Press in 1972, Hamburger tried to remedy one of the shortcomings of the first anthology. In this first major anthology of East German poetry to appear in the States, Hamburger collected one hundred and eighteen poems by twelve poets, with renderings by seven translators, among them Middleton, Ruth and Matthew Mead, and Christopher Levenson. Hamburger himself contributed more than half of the poems printed in the anthology, with the sections on Brecht, Heinz Kahlau, Reiner Kunze,

Wolf Biermann, and Kurt Bartsch comprising translations made by Hamburger exclusively. In the Introduction the editor stresses that "it is not a representative anthology in terms of the political division, since that would have called for the inclusion of the sort of verse most in favor with the ideological directors of the régime – exhortatory, self-congratulating pep-verse, antiquated even by the standards of the eighteen-nineties and subliterary in its complete subordination of the medium to the message" (Hamburger 1972: xv). Among the criteria for inclusion Hamburger lists "commitment to the truth of [the poets'] own perceptions, feelings, and convictions," and a preoccupation "with moral and social problems to a degree rare among non-communist poets," which, he thinks, "is another reason why their work is, or should be, of special interest to American and British readers with no direct experience of an almost totally collectivized society" (Hamburger 972: xv). He would have liked to include work by Stefan Hermlin, Erich Arendt, and Peter Gosse, but their diction and verse forms "proved too remote from the practice of their English-writing contemporaries" (Hamburger 1972: xvi).

Originally, this anthology was to be published first in America by a press in Buffalo – whose name Hamburger could not remember in the interview I conducted with him – but they let him down and nothing came of this. Then he sent it to Michael Schmidt, who accepted it and thereby started Hamburger's Carcanet career in Britain, which lasted until the early 1990s when Hamburger broke with Schmidt, who – according to Hamburger – subsequently ordered all his books to be scrapped. Dutton, who had already published the revised edition of *Reason and Energy* as *Contraries* in 1971, took it over from Carcanet. In 1977 Carcanet published Hamburger's 500-page bi-lingual anthology *German Poetry 1910–1975*, whose co-publisher should have been Urizen Books, but it was finally withdrawn. According to Hamburger,

> there was a terrible disaster of the American edition. It first went to the translator Michael Roloff of Urizen Books, who was an eminent businessman on the New York publishing scene. They must have set it separately, because obviously the Carcanet edition was all right. I remember that I corrected the proofs, but then the book came out in his form and not in mine. It was withdrawn and the man disappeared from the publishing scene. Years later I got a summons to New York to go to bankrupt proceedings. I was supposed to claim money from him for compensation for the damage, but I did not go and I just let it go. (Hamburger 1998)

Inter Nationes in Bonn bought three thousand copies for worldwide distribution, which enabled Schmidt to reprint it. In 1981 Schmidt sold the anthology

to Persea Press in New York. Although Hamburger compiled work by ninety-five poets in the anthology, he stresses that "the contents of the anthology do not represent the whole of German, Austrian, and Swiss poetry written over a period of sixty-five years" (Hamburger 1977: xxxii–xxxiii). However, it contains "good and remarkable poems of as many kinds as I could respond to as a translator" (Hamburger 1977: xxxiii). Hamburger asked Middleton whether he wanted to collaborate again, but he turned down the offer: "The reason is that by that time we were much more aware of how different the two of us were" (Hamburger 1998). According to Hamburger (1977: xxv), the anthology "sprang out of two needs: to collect scattered translations done over the decades and to replace the earlier anthology *Modern German Poetry 1910–1960*," which both had both out of print and out of date for some years. In 1978 Hamburger was awarded the Schlegel-Tieck prize for *German Poetry 1910–1975*.

The publicity campaign for this anthology received additional impetus thanks to Hamburger's guest-co-editorship for *TriQuarterly* 35.2 (Winter 1976), which contained sections dedicated to German (edited by M. Hamburger), American (edited by Michael Anania), and French poetry (edited by Paul Auster). Hamburger was asked by the magazine's editor Elliott Anderson to select work from his – then – forthcoming anthology; the final selection, however, was made by Anderson himself, who printed twenty-seven poems by sixteen poets, such as Peter Handke, Günter Kunert, Reiner Kunze, and Jörg Steiner.

The widespread ignorance of literatures in German that Hamburger referred to when characterising the British (non-)reading public in the 1940s and 1950s in his talk entitled "The translator as an intermediary between two cultures," which was given in Amsterdam in March 1993 at the Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature, holds true for today's situation in America:

> As for mediation, I could not rely on translations alone even with German-language writers as securely established in their own cultures now as Goethe, Hölderlin or Büchner. When my work began, in the 1940s, not only was there a strong prejudice against all things German in Britain, but an ignorance that extended to the most well-educated and sophisticated circles. (Hamburger 1993: 10)

Hamburger took the offensive by initiating an educational crusade by way of complementing all his translations with "critical writings, books of essays and obligatory introductions to the works and authors I translated" (Hamburger 1993: 10). In an essay published in a special volume of the influential German magazine *Text und Kritik*, Ruth Klüger painted the same dreary picture of the US-reception of German literature in the early 1990s. If one asked Amer-

icans with an average education about twentieth-century German literature, they would most probably mention the names of Sigmund Freud and Franz Kafka. Intellectuals of the 1960s' generation might even know Thomas Mann's and Hermann Hesse's novels. Some may even have read Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*. In her opinion, only small coteries in New York appreciated Peter Handke's and Thomas Bernhard's works, whereas US-feminists were quite keen on Christa Wolf. According to Klüger, Rilke's poetry was widely known and appreciated (Klüger 1995: 132–35).

Against this context we have to appreciate the invaluable service that two US-presses – Harcourt, Brace & World and Dutton – performed by publishing Hamburger's critical books *The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modern Poetry from Baudelaire to the 1960s* (1970) and *Contraries: Studies in German Literature* (1971) respectively. The latter is the revised edition of *Reason and Energy*, which had been published by Grove Press in 1957. At the same time, i.e., in 1970, Princeton University Press issued *Hofmannsthal: Three Essays*, which basically consists of Hamburger's introductions to the two volumes he edited for the Bollingen Foundation. Out of these three critical studies, *The Truth of Poetry* – where Hamburger provides his readers with a panorama of American and European poetry allocating German poetry its appropriate place – "had most impact and is the only one that is still in print again, having been out of print for a long time" (Hamburger 1998). "Michael Hamburger's richly concrete study," the critic M. L. Rosenthal wrote in *Poetry* (Chicago):

> is as intelligent a reconsideration of what has happened as one can find. [. . .] It is most useful in its overview of contemporary developments in Europe of some of the chief theoretical emphases of our day, all without arbitrariness if not without conviction, and is just one more sign of the awakening in the past few years of British criticism to the question of redefining "modernity." Apart from Hamburger's great specificity, I particularly like his understanding of the real, but protean, elusive, ever shifting and disappearing and reappearing connection between the mind's search for knowledge and practical wisdom and its entrancement by imagination, by aesthetic disinterestedness, and by the plastic possibilities of language.
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> (Rosenthal 1971: 103–4)

Hamburger started a second US-crusade in the mid-1980s with the publication of *A Proliferation of Prophets: Essays on German Writers from Nietzsche to Brecht* and *After the Second Flood: Essays on Post-War German Literature*. "The prose books were my attempt to bring into print all of Michael's durable essays in a kind of 'collected' edition," Michael Schmidt (1998) of Carcanet

Press told me by e-mail. St. Martin's Press, New York, was not Carcanet's co-publisher, but "simply bought in 400–750 copies of our editions." (Schmidt 1998) However, they did not seem to go down well with the American reading public. Hamburger holds that "they did not sell at all. [. . .] Somebody I know in America tried to buy one of those books. He could not get it from a bookshop. They were a complete flop." (Hamburger 1998).

Hamburger's role as critic is not restricted to the publishing of books. Between the mid-1950s and the early 1980s he also played an active role on the American little magazine scene as reviewer for prominent magazines, *Chicago Review* and *Poetry* (Chicago) among them. An excellent example of Hamburger the reviewer is his early review-essay on Erich Heller's *The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern Literature and Thought*, which was published in *Chicago Review* in spring 1958. The following extract is a good example of seriousness of Hamburger's approach to literature:

> [Professor Heller's criticism] expresses a discomfort which many have felt, but few have dared to voice. Though personally I am in favour of what Professor Heller calls "spiritual timidity" in dealing with a matter at once so momentous and so slippery as the theme of this book, it is something to have the courage of one's despair. My own reaction to so extreme a claim for the philosophical approach to literature happens to be a recoil in favour of poetry; but then I have long ceased to live by a gospel compiled out of quotations by my favourite poets; and I have never been able to regard art, or any human activity whatsoever, as unrelated to all other human activities. (Hamburger 1958: 80)

Another interesting example is his well-argued review-essay on David Young's translation of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, which at the time of its publication was acclaimed by several prominent poets as *the* American rendering of Rilke's text, because Young's approach to translation – an attempt to make the text more contemporary, more American by breaking up Rilke's lines in the manner of William Carlos Williams's "variable foot" – runs counter to Hamburger's ethos:

> If it were really necessary for literary works, even works as recent, relatively speaking, as the *Duino Elegies*, to be thoroughly modernized, "updated," in every regard whenever they are newly translated, the implication would be that a contemporary work in English, *The Waste Land*, for instance, calls for similar treatment if it is to remain "alive" and "urgent." This makes the assumption not only false but insulting, since it would mean that readers have become incapable of the slightest effort to adjustment to conventions and periods other than their own. That there are such readers, that there is a trend that way – even among professors who have

> ceased to believe in what they profess – leaves no doubt as to where that assumption leads. (Hamburger 1979: 236)

Instead of a Resumé

Finally, some comments on the subtitle of my essay: the reason why I would like to describe Hamburger's translations as "celebration of German literature" is connected with his ethos, which he sums up at the end of his Introduction to *German Poetry 1910–1975*, when he says, "Like all my translations, these take no more liberties than are needed to come as close as possible to the original texts, that is their tone, gesture, tension, dynamic of feeling as much as their surface 'meaning.' My hope is that they will convey something of the quiddity of each poem, not of my quiddity [. . .]" (Hamburger 1977: xxxiii).

Hamburger's influence as translator of German literature is adequately summed up by the British poet Rodney Pybus in a judgment which, I believe, also holds true for many American readers: "Everyone who has been reading poetry in English in recent decades (especially those without German) is in Michael's debt, for opening so many windows into German literary culture" (Pybus 1994: 5).

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